

Perfect Evil

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Summary: The world knew Joe Carroll and feared him. He was the embodiment of a psychopath in their eyes. That was Elizabeth Hunter's opinion of him as well. She believed him to be a monster. So what happens when a desperate Ryan Hardy sends her undercover to Corban to help catch the serial killer? And more importantly, why is her view of Joe Carroll changing?

1. Chapter 1

Elizabeth Hunter stared at her reflection. Bloodshot eyes and a nearly sickly complexion greeted her in the mirror. This wasn't the image she wanted projected on her first day back at work. At the F.B.I, nonetheless. Her last assignment was still giving her nightmares. She'd killed a man for the first time in her life. The image of crimson liquid seeping from his chest and the life fleeing his eyes were haunting her.

She was still supposed to have a few days of leave so imagine her surprise when she'd received a phone call from Ryan Hardy. She knew of his reputation and also that his current case involved Joe Carroll. To say he'd been brief was generous and curiosity had gotten the best of her.

Dressed in a casual business suit that stated 'don't mess with me', she made her way down the packed hallways of the Bureau, ignoring the looks and whispers headed her way. Her gaze landed on Ryan Hardy's figure and rushed to him.

"Mr. Hardy," she loudly began, catching his attention. He wearily looked her over seemingly confused. "I'm Elizabeth Hunter. You called yesterday and requested that we meet."

His eyes widened slightly as he took in her appearance. She may not like it, but there was a reason why her colleagues called her 'Ice Queen' or 'bitch'. To the man's credit he quickly recovered and

motioned for her to follow him. She was aware that he was a man of few words, but this was ridiculous. Did he expect her to just follow him like an obedient puppy? Her mouth started talking before checking with the reasonable side of her brain, like usually.

"I know your reputation and I respect you, but you could at least tell me why you brought me here instead of just showing me to follow you."

Surprised blue orbs turned to study her again and this time the man acknowledged her with a nod. "I have a potential assignment for you. If you are willing to accept it."

Shock overwhelmed her. The best task force of the F.B.I needed her? She knew she was good, but compared to Ryan Hardy? She was rookie. "I..." her words got stuck in her throat when she saw the boards filled with images of Joe Carroll and his followers, she deduced.

A younger man and a woman walked to her. "Agent Hunter, these are agents Mike Weston and Gina Mendez. As you probably assumed, they work with me on the Joe Carroll case."

To say she was speechless was an understatement. Did they want to hand her an assignment related to Joe Carroll or was she jumping to conclusions and they simply wanted her to bring them coffee or something? Catching on to her bewilderment, Ryan continued:

"We have recently pinpointed Emma Hill's whereabouts and we suspect that is where Joe Carroll is heading after the disaster at Lily Gray's compound."

Elizabeth was even more confused. Where was this conversation going?

"It's a cult called Corban, founded a decade ago," continued Ryan.

"That's great. If you know where he is, go arrest him. Still, I don't get what this has to do with me?"

"He's not there yet. At least not according to our intel. Corban is located in a remote location in the middle of a forest. We can't place a surveillance detail without their scouts knowing. That's why we want someone on the inside, who can alert us to Emma's moves or if Joe shows up."

The breath was knocked out of her lungs. They expected her to go undercover in Joe Carroll's cult? Were they insane? She shook her head, ordering her derailing thoughts. "You're completely out of your minds. Joe Carroll is a deranged sociopath who will see straight through my cover. I might take risks from time to time, but I don't have a death wish. Don't you have more experienced agents?"

Gina nodded, a silent way of telling Elizabeth she was right while Ryan and Mike exchanged knowing looks. Mike seemed to accept her choice, but Ryan was known for his resilience. The young woman steeled herself for an attempt to convince her.

"You're right," Ryan finally declared. "You were not our first choice. Hell, you were not even our third, but everyone else declined. I've

seen your record. You were top of your class and you excel at undercover work. Besides, you're young and were nowhere near the Carroll case so there are practically no chances of him recognizing you."

Nice try, she thought, but not good enough for her to enter the lion's den. "I'm sorry, but I can't do it," she turned on her heels and headed for the door.

"People will die!" a scream laced with desperation made her halt. "Tens or hundreds will die because you were afraid. Will you be able to sleep at night knowing that you could have prevented that? Will you just be able to resume your life and merely change the channel when another Joe Carroll murder is on the news?"

Damn, he'd hit her soft spot. She knew she couldn't. Sighing, she turned around. "You know I can't," she fired back at him. If he was going to send her to a safe death, at least she will give him a piece of her temper. "So, tell me, Ryan, how am I supposed to pull off this miracle job of yours?"

"We'll create a fake identity for you to use to infiltrate the cult as a regular member. The cult isolates its members from the outside world, but we will try to sneak a phone in your luggage. If they confiscate it, I can bet my life that Emma has a phone so you will have to use that one if there is any vital information to be conveyed."

"So basically, you've told me a bunch of variables and I'm supposed to simply figure everything out along the way. While trying not to get killed."

"I'm sorry," spoke Mike for the same time. Gina was content to just give her a small smile.

"Save it," she snapped. "Apologies won't keep me alive. Let's work on creating my cover since that might," her tone allowing no more further discussion.

Hours later, they'd come up with what they thought was a perfect new identity. She'd wished to stay as close as possible to the truth so she'd be more believable. Now, she was Katherine Alexander, a 31 year old woman who strived to be a writer. She was a bit of a loner with no real friends and whose parents had died. She worked as a waitress, but had resigned because her long term boyfriend had ended their engagement. It stayed as humanly possible to her real life, but offered enough drama for her decision to join Corban to seem legitimate.

She took the file to study Katherine better and bid goodbye to the three agents she'd just met. They wished her luck and the hope in their eyes was reassuring that she was doing the right thing.

"I think you can do it," Ryan's raspy voice whispered in her ear and, surprisingly, it helped ease some of the nerves that had built up.

* * *

><p>A week later, she was leaving Katherine's small one bedroom apartment and getting in the car with one of Corban's members, a

blonde woman called Tilda whose soulless eyes sent shivers down her back. A dense forest led to a remote campus with a larger building, in which Elizabeth assumed were the leaders, and smaller ones for the members. As expected, she and her luggage were searched and her phone was taken away from her.<p>

Tilda proceeded to guide her to the mansion where a man and a woman greeted her. "I'm Micah and this is Julia, my wife." He hugged her and the blonde followed her husband's lead. They were trying to earn her trust, she concluded.

A series of questions followed, but she answered them without blinking, her new identity familiar enough to make it believable. A white robe and mask were handed to her and with them the orders to never take them off in public until she passed the initiation.

"It's an honour to have you join us and share our beliefs," they finally declared and Melanie barely suppressed a sigh of relief. She'd accomplished the first step.

"It's an honour for me to be welcomed here," she answered meekly as expected of the weak woman she was portraying.

"Tilda will take you to your room," Micah commanded at the same time dismissing them. That's when a slender blonde with short cropped hair burst into the chamber.

"Joe's coming," she announced, her voice beaming with pride and happiness at the news she was delivering. Elizabeth immediately recognized Emma Hill and couldn't help but stare at the woman. She didn't seem threatening, but there was an edge to her voice and posture. Probably feeling another pair of eyes burning a hole into her, Emma turned.

"Who the hell are you?" she demanded.

Remembering her place, Elizabeth lowered her brown eyes. "I'm Katherine," she murmured.

"She's the newest addition to our cult," dismissed Micah, jerking his head in Tilda's way, ordering her to take Elizabeth away.

Emma narrowed her eyes suspiciously, but Elizabeth remained silent and showed her obedient character by following Tilda. This is what was expected of a follower so she would deliver. It would keep her alive.

"Who was that?" she feigned ignorance.

"Emma Hill."

Elizabeth could swear she heard disdain hidden behind her voice, but her gut told her not to challenge the bigger woman.

"What about Joe?"

"You'll see," dodged again Tilda.

"When is he coming?"

It seemed that she'd pushed too hard because Tilda abruptly turned around. "What's with all the questions?"

Panicking on the inside, she faked a smile. "I'm just curious."

"Well, don't be," she stopped in front of a grim looking building "This is where you'll be staying. You have your own room and bathroom. Last door on the left."

With that, she left. Elizabeth pushed the doorknob with a trembling hand, and only allowed emotions to surface once she was safely in her small chamber. What had she gotten herself into? Why was Joe here so fast and how could she alert Ryan without meeting her end? All the questions were weighing on her tired brain so she plopped on the uncomfortable bed to try and get some sleep.

Despite the restless nature of slumber, it was still comforting although cut short by a woman practically breaking down her door. She was flushed and her face expressed joy and a small amount of fear.

"Come down to the stage. He's here."

>Without further explanations, she ran down her hallway. Her disoriented mind needed a few seconds to realize the implications of the woman's voice, but once it did there was no doubt.<p>

Joe Carroll had arrived.

2. Chapter 2

'The stage' as the woman had referred it to laid just outside the main building. Dozens of benches faced a wooden platform and people were crowding the yard. You would think there would be chaos, but they moved in an orderly fashion, each taking their rightful spot. The cool evening air helped ease some of the nerves boiling inside of her. Confused, she searched for a place to sit, but there didn't seem to be any left. Elizabeth's eyes roamed over the group again, but found nothing. She felt like a fish out of water in her white robes amongst dozens of crimson attires.

Suddenly, everyone stood up, wonder shining in their eyes. Micah stepped onto the stage, a smug smile gracing his features. He was proud of his position as a leader and craved for people's submission, the profiler in her deduced.

Clearing his throat he began:

"Tonight, an honoured guest of mine joins our family," he paused for effect, " Joe Carroll."

At Micah's cue a tall, imposing figure climbed up on stage. He had raven hair, his stubble hardening his otherwise handsome features. At least the ones that were visible because he was also wearing a white robe just like her. If Elizabeth hadn't known the man's face from the news, she might have been surprised and maybe in disbelief that he could commit all that he was accused of. More so, he was the type of man that naturally drew women in, without having to work hard or pretend to be someone else. Two other people, women, she assumed

because of their build clung to Joe in a strange way: as if they were relying on him for protection and safety.

"Greetings everyone," a British accented voice reached Elizabeth's ears, bringing goose bumps on her skin. "It is an absolute honour to be received in your midst by my dear friend Micah."

That being said, and he already having won some of these people's trust, a smug smile wanted to erupt on his face, but it was reigned in and replaced by a warm one. Meanwhile, Micah and his wife had resumed their places. They were wearing strange costumes and an even stranger mechanism took center stage. It was a contraption unlike any she'd seen before and it seemed to bear the symbol of Corban. An entire speech was delivered by Micah and Elizabeth only understood a part of it. Mostly, it seemed to be revolving around some kind of blood sacrifice that meant salvation. The kind of crap that served as a means to exploit weak, needy persons.

Thankfully, the enthralled people surrounding her reminded her that she was just like them. Well, Katherine was and at the moment if she allowed any shred of Elizabeth to come to light she was as good as dead. The only one who seemed unnerved was Joe Carroll who was eyeing curiously the proceedings.

All of a sudden, Julie started spinning as if possessed, searching for their next sacrifice. Her little 'pointing stick' stopped briefly on Joe, but resumed its moving until it pointed at the woman on Joe's right- Emma. Elizabeth was shell-shocked. There was obviously no deity guiding her moves so why was Julie threatening to kill Joe's most devout follower? Something that she wasn't aware of had transpired between Micah's wife and the serial killer. This was obviously a power play designed by Julie, but to what end?

"No! Micah, please!" Joe desperately shouted, looking at the man on stage who merely responded that this was God's will. Another rage filled plea followed and the men behind Joe had to grab both of his hands to keep him from stopping this deranged spectacle. Everyone was cheering and seemed to be enjoying themselves. She felt like vomiting. Did she really end up in a place where she would have to watch a woman, whether be it Emma Hill or anyone else, be killed in front of her? Was she really supposed to just go with it, pretend like it did not affect her?

Still, it was not Elizabeth's job to save Emma Hill. No, her job was to keep a low profile, and attempt to reach the phone to alert Ryan Hardy of Joe's whereabouts. That was it: Ryan Hardy. What would he do in this situation? He would follow the mission protocol and not risk jeopardizing it.

They roughly dragged Emma to the stage and threw her in another man's arms. The contraption had spun around and it now showed that it had sturdy restraints that a mindful follower had opened in anticipation to the upcoming blood ritual.

"Stop!" she found herself yelling at the bottom of her lungs. Apparently, she was no Ryan Hardy. Everyone, even the ones carrying Emma stopped to look at the woman in the white robe. She'd really fucked up this time, she could tell by the look on Julia and Micah's faces. How in the world could she explain this outburst? Poor, meek and submissive Katherine would never have done such a thing. Curious,

disdainful, even hateful glares were thrown her way while Elizabeth was trying to conjure up a way to get herself out of the hole she'd dug herself into.

"Apparently our newest member, Katherine, has something to say," spoke Micah. "Tell us, what troubles you_, my dear_?" he added ironically. Thankfully, judging by the lack of a more severe reaction, her word had been interpreted as a momentarily show of weakness. It wasn't a bad outcome so Elizabeth decided to roll with it. Keeping quiet, she lowered her eyes, not before catching Joe's stare. It was laced with more suspicion than she would have liked, him clearly being the more intelligent one between the cult leaders. If she made it tonight she would have to pay even more attention to the murderer.

"Your artistic soul does not condone our practices?" Micah's cold voice drew her back to him. He knew she was supposed to be a writer-they'd really done a thorough background check on her. Staying in line with her personality, she kept quiet so the man felt compelled to fill the silence. "Tell me, do you not approve of the Holy Spirit," he lifted his hands to the sky, "getting what he deserves?"

She wanted to scream in his face that he was a deranged psychopath but that would get her killed so she maintained quiet. If not for the shout before, she could have successfully passed as a mute.

"Your silence tells me what I need to know. You are afraid of what must be done and you do not understand it. Yet you will, He will show you," he pointed to the sky. "The Lord has spoken to me," he turned to his audience. "Release Emma," he ordered to the surprise of everyone, the relief of Joe and Julia's contempt. Elizabeth was preparing her victory dance because she'd not jeopardized the mission and kept a human being from being butchered on an altar when Micah's following words nearly knocked her down. "Take Katherine instead."

Emma rushed to Joe's side and was that genuine concern and relief when Joe got her back? Unfortunately, fleeing was not an option and the only person who had previously opposed to this sadistic practice had no reason to do it again. After all, he was a sociopath so why should he intervene for someone he didn't even know?

Two masked men roughly grabbed a hold of her, pulling her towards the strange machine. The cheering had resumed. Briefly, she attempted to fight, her F.B.I instincts kicking in, but that would only damage her position further. So she ceased all movement and allowed herself to be carried and strapped to that horrible device so much as a whimper of protest.

This is how I die, she bitterly contemplated as Micah spewed some more of his religious babble. She'd told Ryan she wasn't ready and that she would monumentally fuck this up, but he'd been stubborn to send her in anyway. Now, with this turn of events, fate seemed to agree with her. Unfortunately.

In spite of the leather bounds digging into her skin and the fear building in her stomach, she could not miss the glares Joe and Julia threw each other. Julia caught her eyes first and sneered at her, clearly angry at Elizabeth. I ruined her plan, thought the agent, she

wanted to weaken and humiliate Joe in front of the cult and all she got was one of her own people standing up against her methods. Another enemy to worry about if I make it past tonight, she sighed.

His speech having ended, she found herself upside down, her head and arms directly above a metal vessel. Micah was coming closer, the glint of moonlight reflecting on his steel knife. In that moment, Elizabeth risked a glance at Joe Carroll. The reason for doing this was a mystery to her, but something pulled her towards gauging his reaction. The two women were each clinging to one of his hands and, surprisingly, he didn't seem to mind. This Joe Carroll that she was seeing right now seemed to defy the diagnosis imposed by countless psychiatrists. He seemed to care about Emma and the other one. A shudder went through her entire body when she realized that he too was intently staring at her. Their eyes met and for a few moments neither one of them moved. It was as if a competition had begun and they were fighting to see which one could figure the other first. Then, the most unexpected thing happened: Joe nodded at her.

Was it a sign of gratitude for practically taking Emma's place on this 'cross' of terror? Was it his way of saying he was onto her? Or had he already seen through her act?

There was no time to dwell on either option because Micah pulled up the sleeves of her robe and without further warning slit her wrists. Louder cheers erupted from the crowd. It made Elizabeth want to puke. That is how sickening these people were. Pain radiated from the cuts and she could feel blood slowly making its way to the bronze coloured vessel. The smell of copper filled her nostrils as more and more crimson rolled down her hands. Micah had ensured to slice as deep as possible and she was starting to grow fainter and fainter with each second. The cult leader went as far as taking some blood in a goblet and drinking it, clearly savoring every moments of her torture. What kind of monster was Micah?

Tears had formed and try as she might she could not hold all of them in. Black dots clouded her vision and she prayed to the real God out there to allow her to pass out. Give her some reprieve so she would not have to endure the sight of people cheering for her suffering. A last, confusing impulse took over and she had no fight left in her. It had been drained along with her life-giving liquid. Ironical how she was sent in to apprehend Joe Carroll and Emma Hill and she ended up dying for them.

After that, she gave in and turned her head as much as her fading strength would allow it. All so she could glimpse into Joe Carroll's eyes once more. Why she did it though, was a mystery. Soon, she surrendered to the darkness as blood continued to seep out of her.

End
file.